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Focusing on internal stakeholders to enable the implementation of organizational change towards corporate entrepreneurship: A case study from France

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ABSTRACT

Although previous studies have highlighted the importance of implementing corporate entrepreneurship to foster innovation within organizations, little emphasis has been placed on examining the concept from a change management perspective. In an attempt to bridge this gap, the current study aims at understanding the mechanisms and tools that top managers can use in order to involve internal stakeholders in driving a change process to adopt a corporate entrepreneurship strategy. The paper discusses the findings that emerged from an exploratory study carried out within “Poult”, a French biscuit manufacturer, which has embarked on an organization-wide effort to instil a culture of corporate entrepreneurship. The findings are examined in the context of stakeholder theory and Kotter's (1996) change model with a focus on the importance of internal marketing strategy during the change process. The contribution of managerial and organizational mechanisms towards fostering corporate entrepreneurship are highlighted.

1. Introduction

The external environment today is dynamic, characterised by turbulence and continuous change constantly posing challenges, opportunities and threats to businesses. In this context, organizations have no other choice than to engage in organizational change albeit considered quite challenging (Poole & Van de Ven, 2004; Soparnot, 2009, 2013; Vít, 2017) and risky (Bertoncel, Erenda, Bach, Roblek, & Meško, 2018; Capgemini, 2009; Desvaux, Devillard-Hoellinger, & Baumgarten, 2007; Zorn, Norman, Butler, & Bhussar, 2017).

Previous empirical work focused primarily on the change process (Galpin, 1996; Garvin, 2000; Jick, 1991; Judson, 1991; Khurram & Charreire Petit, 2017) while others highlighted the importance of change management in fostering firms' competitiveness (May & Stahl, 2017). More recently, researchers have started paying attention to the role played by different actors during the change process. Research carried out by Oreg, Bartunek, Lee, and Do (2018) highlighted the central and active roles that change recipients play in organizational change events. Compared to the change agent (mostly from the top management side), change recipients can contribute to the change

process if they receive attention and appraisal. Our research, totally in line with this recent research stream, studies corporate entrepreneurship strategy as a change event in organizations, aiming to answer the following question: *What are the mechanisms that facilitate the involvement of internal stakeholders during the change process in order to implement a corporate entrepreneurship strategy?*

With increased attention to employees' initiatives to foster innovation capability in a company, their role as internal stakeholders is considered critical during the change process. The present study uses Kotter's (1996) model to highlight the managerial and organizational mechanisms necessary in launching a change process within the organization, instilling a culture that nourishes entrepreneurship and innovation (Papasolomou, 2006). To address the problem under investigation, the authors have carried out an exploratory case study of one of the oldest and most reputable biscuit manufacturers in France, “Poult”. The company had embarked on an organization-wide change process in an effort to instil a strong entrepreneurial culture within the organization, one that fosters innovation among its workforce.

The discussion that follows focuses primarily on studying the relevant literature to set the foundation for the key concepts explored in

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Table 1
Kotter's (1996) model.

Steps	Recommendations for the change	Key conditions for success
Step 1. Establishing sense of urgency	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Examining market and competitive realities - Identifying and discussing crises, potential crises, or major opportunities 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - All stages are necessary (no shortcuts) - At least 75% of managers must believe “the status quo is more dangerous than the unknown”
Step 2. Forming a powerful guiding coalition	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Assembling a group with enough power to lead the change effort 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Coalitions, in larger companies, need to be 20–50 people - Communication must be multi-channelled and continuous
Step 3. Creating a vision	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Encouraging the group to work together as a team - Creating a vision to help direct the change effort 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Thousands of people must be willing to help with “short-term sacrifices”
Step 4. Communicating the vision	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Developing strategies for achieving that vision - Using every vehicle possible to communicate the new vision and strategies 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Need to allow for broader job latitude - Need rewards/performance appraisal to match new vision
Step 5. Empowering others to act on the vision	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Teaching new behaviors by the example of the guiding coalition - Eliminating obstacles to change - Changing systems or structures that seriously undermine the vision 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Managers must be positive, visible role models - Proactive explanations made showing connections between new approaches and improved performance
Step 6. Planning for and creating short-term wins	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Encouraging risk taking and non-traditional ideas, activities and actions - Planning for visible performance improvements - Creating those improvements - Recognizing and rewarding employees involved in the improvements 	
Step 7. Consolidating improvements and producing still more change	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Using increased credibility to change systems, structures, and policies that do not fit the vision - Hiring, promoting, and developing employees who can implement the vision - Reinvigorating the process with new projects, themes, and change agents 	
Step 8. Institutionalizing new approaches	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Articulating the connections between the new behaviors and corporate success - Developing the means to ensure leadership development and succession 	

the specific case study. These are: organizational change, corporate entrepreneurship, and stakeholder theory. The literature review section is then followed by an analysis of the research design and methodological approach adopted. The findings that emerged from the data analysis are then examined in the context of Kotter's eight steps change model that portrays the various drivers of corporate entrepreneurship, and the analysis is structured in such a way so as to highlight the vital role played by internal stakeholders in the success of the organizational change process. The study's findings provided the foundation for revealing both organizational and managerial considerations that are critical in the development of an effective corporate entrepreneurship strategy. The discussion finally concludes by highlighting the theoretical and practical implications of the study.

2. Literature review

2.1. Organizational change

Collerette et al. (1997, p. 20) define organizational change as “... a relatively durable transformation in a subsystem of the organization provided that such change is observable by its members or by the people who are connected with it.” Soparnot (2013), based on the work of March (1981), explains that organizational change is a set of concordant responses by the different internal parts of the organization which interact with their environments. Soparnot (2013) further identified three facets which are interdependent and as such cannot be examined in isolation in studying change management: (a) context (why change?); (b) content (what to change?) and (c) process (how to change?).

The evolution of organizational change depends on changing the context in which organizations operate and all members of the organization can become initiators of change (Appelbaum et al., 2017; Demers, 1999). Furthermore, external factors such as economic, technological, political and social as well as internal factors which are associated to the organization itself can trigger the need for

organizational change (Appelbaum et al., 2017; Rondeau, 1999). The content of organizational change can be linked to the strategy, structure, socio-technical system, or culture of the company. The transformation process often involves a wide variety of elements (Abdallah & Ammar-Mamlouk, 2007; Oreg et al., 2018; Pinchot, 1985; Rondeau, 1999; Soparnot, 2013) subsequently increasing the degree of complexity and difficulty of the process itself.

The complexity of the phenomenon often requires the mobilization of a *process approach* (Pettigrew, 1985, 1987; Sminia, 2016). In the context of organizational change, studying the transformation steps and the interactions between the actors involved is necessary (Soparnot, 2013). Lewin (1947) and Weick (1969), recommend breaking down the process into different phases, since it is, in essence, a transition process (Vandangeon Derumez, 1998; Yatchinovsky, 2012). The literature reviewed revealed alternative models each of which depict the stages needed for implementing organizational change. Judson's (1991) model identifies people's behavioural reactions towards change and proposes methods such as rewards and negotiation to minimize resistance to change. Jick's (1991) model emphasizes factors which can impact the success of the change process such as the nature of the change, the sensitivity of actors towards change, and the continuous nature of the change process. Galpin's (1996) model proposes a comprehensive process based primarily on communication. Garvin's (2000) model, building on Lewin's (1947) and Kerr's (2000) work, proposes seven steps that act as a checklist towards change.

In addition to the abovementioned models, the most used model is Kotter's (1996, 2007) framework. Originally developed in 1995 (Kotter, 1995) and published again in 1996 (Kotter, 1996) following a rigorous analysis of the change implementation approaches and subsequent management failures of one hundred different organizations, this model has been extensively tested by other researchers (Ansari & Bell, 2009; Casey, Payne, & Eime, 2012; Day & Atkinson, 2004; Goede, 2011; Gupta, 2011; Joffe & Glynn, 2001; Lintukangas, Peltola, & Virolainen, 2009; Nitta, Wrobel, Howard, & Jimmerson-Eddings, 2009; Sidorko,

2008; Smith, 2011 and Yauch & Steudel, 2003). Moreover, its emphasis on: (a) management failures (Casey et al., 2012; Sidorko, 2008; Smith, 2011) and (b) the strategic focus of the change process, justifies using Kotter's model to provide the theoretical context required for this study.

Table 1 presents the eight steps of Kotter's change framework and indicates specific recommendations for accomplishing each step in order to bring about organizational change.

Although Kotter's model is quite detailed in terms of the steps that need to be implemented for initiating and implementing change within an organization, it does not highlight the critical role played by the different actors during the change process. The authors of this paper argue that the model can be enhanced by focusing on the role of internal stakeholders (Papasolomou, 2006) during the change process.

2.2. Corporate entrepreneurship

Corporate entrepreneurship is gaining ground within the existent literature as a vehicle towards strategic renewal and change, enabling an organization to make a shift to innovation and entrepreneurial orientation (Barringer & Bluedorn, 1999; Chebbi, Sellami, & Saidi, 2018; Shaw, O'loughlin, & McFadzean, 2005; Yunis, Tarhini, & Kassar, 2018). Widén, Olander, and Atkin (2013) posit that the way a firm engages its stakeholders influences innovation. The implementation of corporate entrepreneurship requires the integration of the effective adoption of specific organizational practices such as decentralization of authority, participation in decision-making, cooperation, avoidance of bureaucracy and encouragement of risk taking and creativity (Hayton, 2005; Shafique & Kalyar, 2018; Strebler, 1996).

The implementation of a corporate entrepreneurship strategy depends on the existence of a working environment that nourishes innovation and collaboration among organizational members. Such an environment affects employees' perceptions towards risk and allows them to take risks, and challenges the status quo allowing its members to initiate change. The CEAI method (Corporate Entrepreneurship Assessment Instrument) is mainly used by researchers and practitioners to identify the factors setting up and enhancing corporate entrepreneurship (Kuratko, Hornsby, & Hayton, 2015; Kuratko, Montagnò, & Hornsby, 1990). This method, which was tested and validated by Hornsby, Kuratko, and Zahra (2002) and Hornsby, Kuratko, Holt, and Wales (2013), identified five main factors: top management support, work discretion, reward system, time availability, and organizational boundaries. These are presented next.

2.2.1. Top management support

Top managers must encourage entrepreneurial initiatives by identifying new opportunities (Carrier, 1997; Ridge, Johnson, Hill, & Bolton, 2017), and organizational change towards becoming a more innovative company. This can be facilitated through an investment in human and financial resources strategy. Moreover, top managers can cultivate diversity in the firm's human resource strategy in order to encourage learning and creativity by combining the workforce ages, cultures, nationalities, and competences (Li, Sun, & Dong, 2018; Watson, Kumar, & Michaelsen, 1993), and management's support can instil a culture of sharing, creativity, acceptance of errors and uncertainty (McGinnis & Verney, 1987). The success of any initiative aimed at innovation is dependent on the leadership of top management, which has to share vision risk, exercise a relatively informal control, and value the right to make mistakes (Huang, 2015; Ireland, Covin, & Kuratko, 2009).

2.2.2. Work discretion

According to Kuratko et al. (1990), work discretion is linked to the context in which employees operate and create. It encompasses the values and the symbols of the organization (Baskaran, 2017; Thévenet & Chevalier, 1986). Innovation driven companies are characterized by creativity, initiative collaboration, and an "entrepreneurial spirit"

(Harper, Glew, & Rowe, 2008). In order to turn innovation into the driving force behind the organizational efforts, businesses need to give autonomy, empower and motivate their employees (Ireland et al., 2009). There is also a need to reduce formalization and increase flexibility (Burns & Stalker, 1966; Yaşoğlu, Temelli, & Aydinlik, 2017) to instil a culture of collaboration and information sharing (Barrett & Weinstein, 1998) and subsequently enable the organization to change (Zahra & George, 2002). Ireland et al. (2009) claim that less formalized organizations can facilitate the corporate entrepreneurship.

2.2.3. Reward system

Hornsby et al. (2013) highlight the importance of implementing organizational activities that encourage collaborations towards innovation. Monetary rewards such as bonuses and non-monetary rewards such as recognition, can encourage the internal stakeholders to be proactive and innovative while focusing on customers, service quality and service mindedness (Kadariusman & Herabadi, 2018; Kuratko, 2011; Papasolomou & Vrontis, 2006; Taylor, 2001).

2.2.4. Time availability

Hornsby et al. (2013) emphasize the importance of resources in adopting corporate entrepreneurship within an organization placing emphasis on time as a resource. They suggest that employees have to be flexible in terms of their work schedule and management has to give employees free time in order to motivate them to participate actively in the innovation strategy (Hobbs & Poupart, 1988).

2.2.5. Organizational boundaries

The way the organization is driven can encourage an innovative behavior within the entire organization (Hornsby et al., 2013). Specifically, it is vital that the organizational members, engaging in innovation projects and sharing knowledge, are independent and not hindered by hierarchical boundaries (Carrier, 1997; Hwang, Singh, & Argote, 2015). Information is exchanged freely and there is an open flow of communication (Botcheva, White, & Huffman, 2002). In addition, the organization needs to invest in training programs and employee development, monetary and non-monetary rewards to instil a culture that nourishes innovation, and risk-taking (Hwang et al., 2015).

In order to drive the organization towards corporate entrepreneurship and innovation, it is clear that a change management process must be implemented; one that emphasizes the role of internal stakeholders as facilitators of this change, and key contributors to its success.

2.3. Stakeholder theory and the notion of 'internal stakeholders'

Stakeholder theory is conceptualized as firm theory, referring to an explanation or foundation of the firm's existence (Donaldson & Preston, 1995). Wieland (2011, p. 227) suggests that: "the nature of the firm can then be determined as a contractual nexus of stakeholder resources and stakeholder interests...with the aim of economic value creation...". Retolaza, San-Jose, and Aguado (2016) extended this perspective by highlighting that the value added should not simply be financial since the stakeholders involved in an organization may have broader and more diverse interests (Argandona, 1998). A broader description of stakeholders should adopt one that does not merely include those that provide resources – those that 'affect' according to the terminology used by Freeman (1984, 2010) and Freeman, Harrison, and Wicks (2007), but also those that are affected by the organization. Freeman's (1984, p. 25) stakeholder approach defines stakeholders as: "any group or individual who can affect or is affected by the achievement of the firm's objectives."

Jensen (2001) and Sundaram and Inkpen (2004) postulate that stakeholder theory tends to focus more on taking care of people rather than on financial returns, efficiency and sustainable economic returns. Discourse of stakeholder theory could be divided into normative, instrumental and descriptive modes (Donaldson & Preston, 1995;

Friedman & Miles, 2006; Hwang et al., 2015). The (a) descriptive mode sets out how the organization operates in terms of stakeholder management; (b) the instrumental mode demonstrates how to attain organizational objectives through stakeholder management; and (c) the normative mode defines how businesses should operate, especially in relation to moral principles. In a situation of change management, these modes could be important when managing the different stakeholders involved in the process.

According to Christensen (2004), many companies possess a bundle of unexploited resources; resources like a mixture of skills, experiences, competencies and capabilities of employees that cannot easily be copied or transferred. These resources, also called internal stakeholders, are key players in a change process. Instilling a culture of corporate entrepreneurship within an organization requires having internal stakeholders onboard and this increased awareness and acceptance of the employees' importance in organizational change and implementation has led to the adoption of internal marketing (Papasolomou, 2006; Papasolomou, Kitchen, & Christofi, 2017; Varey & Lewis, 1999).

Internal marketing is a strategy that can be adopted to promote employee satisfaction and motivation in organizational activities and corporate entrepreneurship development. Organizational development is perceived as a process which fosters organizational activities towards creativity, innovation and risk taking, however, instilling a culture that fosters corporate entrepreneurship relies heavily on employee behavior which is conducive towards this end. Nalbantian and Szostak (2004) claim that organizations that select, develop, manage and motivate their workforce to innovate and produce outstanding business results have an extraordinary competitive advantage that others cannot copy. Internal marketing as a term evolves from the notion that employees constitute an internal market within the organization; this market needs to be informed, educated, trained, rewarded and motivated in order to create positive employee attitudes and meet corporate goals (Papasolomou et al., 2017; Papasolomou-Doukakis & Kitchen, 2004), and in turn will be able to develop and offer products and services that are expected and accepted by customers (Shams, 2015; Shams, 2016a,b). With a direct correlation between internal marketing, participative decision making and employee empowerment (Zampetakis & Moustakis, 2007), internal marketing gives the power to all the employees in the organization to implement change and contributes to the identification of internal entrepreneurs (or champions) who can undertake the role of leading innovation and organizational change (Ivancevich & Gilbert, 2000; Ozuem, Limb, & Lancaster, 2018).

3. Method

3.1. Research approach

This study aims to understand how internal stakeholders were involved and managed during the implementation of a successful corporate entrepreneurship strategy. To reach this understanding, the authors discuss the findings of an exploratory case study within "Poult", a French manufacturer, and carry out an extensive examination and application (Hlady Rispal & Jouison-Laffitt, 2014, 2015; Hussey & Hussey, 1997) of the steps highlighted by Kotter's model. The discussion highlights the important role internal stakeholders' play during organizational change and towards the success of the change effort.

The case-study methodology seemed the most relevant to understand the change process towards entrepreneurship and innovation followed by the company Poult, and answer questions such as How and Why (Yin, 2009, 2016). The study was qualitative in nature since data was gathered through semi-structured interviews with managers and employees involved in this process.

3.2. Research context

Poult is a family owned business founded in 1988 in Montauban,

France by Emile Poult. It operates in the biscuits, rusks, and pastries sector specializing in various dry biscuits. Poult has also gained a reputation for its range of anti-stress biscuits. The company has five production plants in France, two in Bretagne, one in Orleans, and two in the South-western part of the country (Montauban). Its headquarters are in Toulouse, and Poult has an annual production of 330 million packages. It employs a total of 800 employees, 400 of which work in Montauban.

In 2001, Carlos Verkaeren joined Poult as the company's president with an investment fund. He had no background in finance neither knowledge in agribusiness. At that time, the company was going through a difficult period and had to respond to an increasingly hostile and turbulent marketing environment. It was in 2006, following the acquisition of Panier-Tanguy, that the company's management decided to introduce an organization-wide change in terms of structure and management style in pursuit of a more entrepreneurial mission and a focus on innovation.

The company's efforts focused on the firm's internal stakeholders since they identified the important role employees play in the change process. The company's management attempted to build an organizational structure that encourages employee involvement and empowerment in an effort to increase employees' motivation and commitment towards change. Attempts to plan and manage the process of change within work organizations are a rich, complex and often perplexing subject area. Poult's management invested heavily in the implementation of new collaboration management practices, which were perceived to be critical for the success of the restructuring process, subsequently resulting in high levels of employee satisfaction (Biscuiteries Poult innovation director, The White Book, 2014). Between 2006 and 2015, the firm's market share in terms of total revenue increased from 33% to 40% and in 2015, the total revenue reached 210 million euros compared to 180 million in 2010. During this period, 80% of sales were generated nationally and 20% were generated from exports primarily to the United States of America. By April 2016, a new president was appointed, and the company gained a reputation for corporate entrepreneurship. These latest success achievements by Poult but also the original and complex change process the company went through, that of involving internal stakeholders leading them to implement a successful corporate entrepreneurial spirit, have been the decisive factors for using Poult as a case study for this research.

3.3. Data collection

Ten face-to-face interviews with organizational members that had actively participated in the change process and worked on innovative projects had been conducted. Specifically, in-depth interviews with 1 manufacture moderator, 2 innovation moderators, 3 intrapreneur employees, 2 R&D engineers and 2 chief happiness officers were carried out. Each interview lasted approximately 90 min, and all were recorded and transcribed. The interviews focused on several key themes: the context of change, the nature and steps of the change process, the outcomes of the change process in terms of corporate entrepreneurship, the level of involvement of internal stakeholders in the change process, the roles played by each employee in the implementation of the corporate entrepreneurship strategy, and the main tools that enabled this contribution. In order to achieve data triangulation, the researchers also analysed secondary data such as media articles published online and in newspapers, TV interviews given by Poult managers and employees, and internal documents such as the previous and the current organigram. Poult's new policies and new projects' lists were also consulted and integrated in the research.

3.4. Data analysis

The primary data analysis was undertaken parallel to data collection (Miles & Huberman, 1994). The interviews were primarily organized

using NVIVO and nodes were defined. A thematic analysis was then followed based on the steps suggested by Kotter's model of change process and entrepreneurial drivers. This enabled the researchers to relate the information gathered to the research questions and thus formulate conclusions (Ghauri & Gronhaug, 2002).

For internal validity, the data collected was cross-examined with secondary data gathered (Yin, 2009). This enabled the validation of the various stages of the change process, which aimed at transforming both the managerial and organizational levels within the organization resulting in the implementation of a strong strategy of corporate entrepreneurship.

4. Research findings

The findings that emerged from the data analysis are examined in the context of Kotter's eight steps change model that portrays the various drivers of corporate entrepreneurship. The data analysis also highlights the vital role played by the internal stakeholders in the success of the transformation stage. The internal stakeholders' role is examined in the context of the five factors that are conducive towards corporate entrepreneurship based on the CEAI method (Hornsby et al., 2002; Hornsby et al., 2013; Kuratko et al., 1990). The discussion of the study's findings and the examination against Kotter's model is supported by evidence derived from verbatim quotations that follow next.

4.1. Step 1: establishing the sense of urgency

Poult's top management realised that times have changed and managerial approaches and strategies that might have worked in the past are no longer effective. They realised that there is a need to gain a competitive advantage through a focus on innovation, agility and adaptation to the continuously changing external environment: *"the management models applied today within companies' date back to the 19th century. However, classical production methods, such as Taylorism, now clearly show their limits. The expectations of the society and the employees are no longer the same"* (ex-chief happiness officer; Martin, 2017). *"The true competitive advantage lies in the capacity for innovation and the agility of a company"* (Biscuiteries Poult innovation director, The White Book, 2014).

Poult's CEO decided to increase the power and size of the company by acquiring its competitor, Panier-Tanguy, in 2006. This acquisition, that significantly increased the size of the company, highlighted the need to change the organizational structure to one that fosters innovation and an entrepreneurial spirit: *"a classic company to a highly innovative company reforming its internal management"* (chief happiness Officer). The company's senior level managers realised the necessity to form a strong coalition group to support the change effort.

4.2. Step 2: forming a powerful guiding coalition

The change effort was not initially supported by all the organizational members who were suspicious and sceptical: One previous chief happiness officer stated: *"when we started to engage in these managerial changes, people were a bit dubious, they were used to these kinds of changes related to each new director and saw it as a fashion effect that was going to pass."*

Instilling a team effort towards the change process was not easy to achieve. There was a need to bring together people with different areas of expertise, leadership styles and creativity capabilities to support the effort. Poult's CEO believed that every employee has *"an innovative potential"*. In an effort to unite people towards the change effort the firm's management invested and prioritised the communication of a strong vision towards corporate entrepreneurship. The management invited external consultants to provide advice towards the transformation effort and in parallel they formed a strong coalition team that consisted of fifteen managers and five support personnel.

4.3. Step 3: creating a vision

The company's management team created a strong vision aimed at subsequently changing the organizational structure into a more participative one and creating an organizational culture that emphasized the importance of internal stakeholders. The firm's CEO gave an inspiring speech during which he emphasized the importance of employees and the need for all organizational members to be given the opportunity to innovate: *"Create a business where everyone gives the best of themselves and where everyone counts. It is very important, each one has the right to fail, each counts to sharing his/her idea. Innovation is a matter for all; I alone, I serve nothing. I will succeed in ensuring that the enterprise is innovative with the 800 employees, with my 800 colleagues, and then create a system capable of spontaneous renewal, a system that is alive."* (Production manager)

4.4. Step 4: communicating the vision

In order to communicate the corporate vision towards corporate entrepreneurship and innovation and motivate the workforce to work towards this direction, Poult's management attempted to create a working climate characterised by open communication. To this end they invested in internal education and training programs aimed at explaining 'why things are done', the need for organizational change and its impact on people's daily jobs. This organization-wide communication effort was aimed at helping people to understand the rational of things, overcome any resistance to change and unite people in the change effort: *"Before, I did not know why I controlled the cookies, ...why things were done in a certain way..., I did not know why we stopped such a product line...what was the rational for this decision. I did not know why we put the chocolate before the flour.... today I have been explained all that, we communicate openly we behave in this way because of this reason."* (support employee 2).

4.5. Step 5: empowering others to act on the vision

In order to transform the organizational vision of entrepreneurship and innovation into strategies and organizational activities, Poult's management invested in employee empowerment giving employees the freedom and flexibility to take decisions and work towards the achievement of organizational goals: *"There has been a transformation of the role of managers. We became moderators rather than controllers. The manager now becomes moderator, he/she supports the teams, and motivates them towards the company's vision."* (Engineer R&D 1)

To instil a team spirit and a sense of camaraderie, the firm's management recognizes team effort through monetary and non-monetary rewards aimed at strengthening teamwork and collaboration: *"If we all have a good year, well we'll all have the same thing at the end, whatever the position, from the salesman to the operator, the innovator. Everyone receives the same reward at the end. Front line personnel such as salespeople don't have more opportunities for rewards than support personnel...we all get the same incentives."* (Employee 3)

4.6. Step 6: planning for and creating short-term wins

Poult's management carried out periodic reviews of the change effort. These reviews revealed that there was a need to enhance employees' motivation towards the change effort. The management decided to initially invest in establishing a participatory innovation system which was essentially "top down," whereby an employee suggests an idea and the team has to work on it. Subsequently, the management adopted an alternative system conducive of continuous improvement, continuous learning, trial and error approach to how things are done, experimenting with new methods and approaches to doing things, performance assessment and efficiency. This approach was supported by a rewards structure that focused on one's ability to

innovate and the level of risk taken towards innovation. This created a culture of innovation stemming from collective or individual initiatives: “We have the right to experiment, we experiment, if it works, we keep...if it does not work, we rectify or even remove. In the case of an error, we will sit around the table to see where the error comes from, we will then analyze it, to see whether it is a process error, or whether it is a human error... why is it occurring? Is it a lack of training ... they know what is the role of everyone within the company and who starts working on the line every day... who stops it ...there is no leader, we are all equals.” (Engineer R&D 1)

4.7. Step 7: consolidating improvements and producing more change

The firm's management emphasizes the collaboration with several external partners. To this end, it has developed the Poult Start-up Program, to facilitate collaboration with start-ups and other projects: “Today, we collaborate with many start-ups in France. We have certain needs, certainly, but we are also surprised by the results in different fields: agri-food, new technologies, digital, as mentioned in the press” (Manufacture moderator).

4.8. Step 8: institutionalizing new approaches

The organization-wide change effort has enabled the company to not only produce very good financial results, but also to achieve a high level of employee satisfaction (Biscuiteries Poult innovation director, [The White Book, 2014](#)). Critical to the success of the effort was the emphasis given by the top management on teamwork, collaboration, open communication, the elimination of hierarchical boundaries, employee empowerment, and the formation of partnerships with external partners. All these were conducive to changing the organizational structure and culture into one that allowed people to take risks and experiment, innovate and gain a more entrepreneurial spirit: “You can invest in a production chain, you can put 10 million euros with investors to make a biscuit, go get R&D engineers and pastry chefs, but you can never copy a very strong internal culture. And that is what we are putting together with all that is accelerating international development and development of industrial subcontracting to brands and, then, the development of open innovation, an entrepreneurial spirit and a desire to develop new markets. That's very important.” (Employee 2)

5. Discussion

5.1. Organizational and managerial mechanisms leading to corporate entrepreneurship strategy

Poult's management embarked on an organization-wide change management process aimed at adopting corporate entrepreneurship, which was considered as vital in their effort to create a more flexible organization in an increasingly dynamic environment. To this end, internal stakeholders played an instrumental role in adopting an entrepreneurial culture ([Kuratko et al., 1990](#)), evidence that an internal marketing strategy was a prerequisite to the success of the change process since it focused on the critical role of a firm's workforce not only in accepting the need for change but also in implementing it. Building on this important prerequisite, the authors of this study are suggesting that Kotter's eight step change model should be expanded to include a ninth step, one that focuses on the implementation of an internal marketing strategy focusing on the needs and concerns of the internal stakeholders, the firm's internal customers.

In order to instill a culture that fosters corporate entrepreneurship Poult's management not only embarked on a change process that followed Kotter's eight step model but more importantly it engaged in activities that were an integral part of an organization-wide internal marketing effort aimed at transforming the company into one that is driven by innovation through an emphasis on the role of internal customers. The study's findings suggest that the change effort would not be

successful without the commitment and the active participation of the entire workforce irrespective of people's position, job role and responsibilities. It required a strategic and holistic approach to the implementation of an internal marketing strategy.

The results show that the implementation of an internal marketing strategy during the change process was based on various managerial mechanisms. Additionally, some organizational mechanisms were very important to facilitate the involvement of internal stakeholders (top manager, middle managers, teams, entire workforce) and the implementation of the managerial mechanisms as well. In fact, both mechanisms are embedded in the corporate entrepreneurship culture.

5.1.1. Organizational mechanisms

Poult's top management initiated and facilitated the change process. It was the management's determination, dedication and support that provided a solid foundation for the firm's radical organizational transformation from a very traditional mechanistic bureaucratic organization into a more open, flexible, innovative and dynamic ([Carrier, 1997](#)).

Additionally, the organization's structure was transformed in such a way so as to encourage work discretion, employee collaboration, and teamwork ([Harper et al., 2008](#)). The roles of managers were redefined, control and formalization were reduced to allow the creation of a more open and flexible organizational structure, one that allows employees to become more flexible and autonomous, express their creativity and innovation without the fear of making mistakes, participate in projects such as the open lab and the innovation club ([Ireland et al., 2009](#)) but at the same time accept responsibility and accountability.

The firm's management carried out a critical examination of the organizational hierarchy and departmental boundaries ([Botcheva et al., 2002](#)). They emphasized the restructuring of the firm by using decentralization, minimized the functions controlled by the head office to give autonomy to teams and departments, and invested in their employees' personal development in order to enhance both individual and team skills.

5.1.2. Managerial mechanisms

The management used internal education and training programs to overcome the employees' resistance to change, encourage autonomy, risk taking and employee empowerment ([Watson et al., 1993](#)). Senior managers adopted a supportive leadership style focusing on the well-being of the employees and facilitating change by eliminating hierarchical barriers, encouraging employees to experiment, tolerating errors, giving initiatives for innovation, investing in their employees' development in order to gain new knowledge and skills, and by using employee surveys to assess satisfaction levels.

The firm's management invested in a reward system that aimed at motivating the internal stakeholders to become committed to the change effort ([Hornsby et al., 2013](#)). The reward system was designed so that recognition and rewards were given for team effort and the achievement of team goals rather than individual targets. The aim was to instill a strong team spirit, recognition and unite people towards the company's vision for corporate entrepreneurship ([Papasolomou & Vrontis, 2006](#)).

An integral part of the internal marketing effort was the reduction of administrative tasks given to internal stakeholders allowing them more time for creativity and innovation. Employees were given daily time to participate in teams, encouraging creativity and instilling a strong team spirit and a sense of camaraderie ([Hornsby et al., 2013](#)). Teams were trusted and given the autonomy to manage their time as they wished. This trust and flexibility contributed significantly towards increasing people's creativity.

The top management communicated clearly the company's vision about corporate entrepreneurship. It invested in the creation of an open system of communication in order to explain the necessity for change and the need to become more innovative as a means of gaining a competitive advantage and surviving in a dynamic external

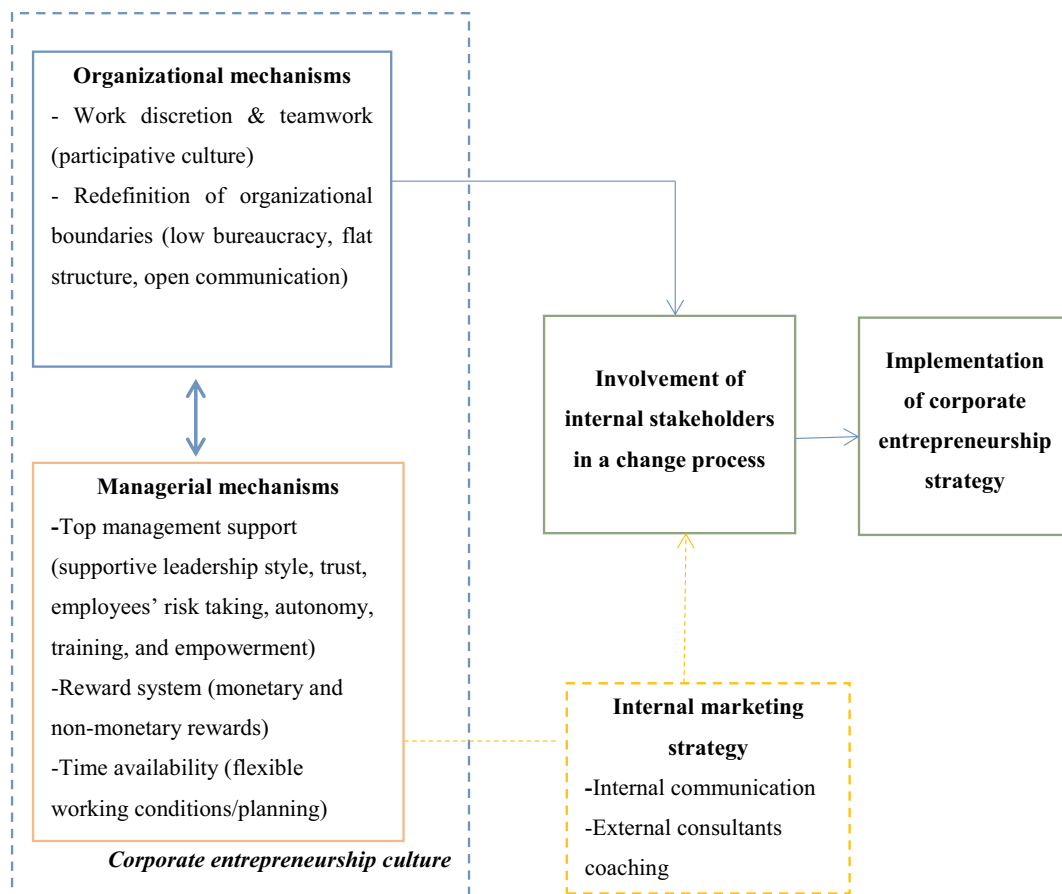


Fig. 1. Proposed theoretical framework for implementing strategic change towards corporate entrepreneurship.

environment. Attempting to communicate the new vision throughout the organization, Poul's management integrated a coordinated internal communication effort in its internal marketing strategy that focused on the employees' need to understand the rationale for embarking on a change process. The internal communication effort included various tools such as personal meetings, exchange of emails, focus group discussions, quality circles, in-house posters, and briefings all aimed at highlighting the need for change and explaining how this change can take place. External consultants were also used whose aim was to coach the employees and support them through the change process, with the ultimate aim to overcome employees' resistance. All actions helped to create an innovative organization and to include change in employee's goals, performance management process, and compensation plan (Prelipean & Bejinaru, 2016).

The following theoretical framework (see Fig. 1) summarizes the main findings of this study. It highlights the main mechanisms needed to involve internal stakeholders in the change process in order to implement a corporate entrepreneurship strategy. Three main frameworks are combined: the change Kotter's model, the CEAI method and the internal marketing strategy.

As described in the figure, the involvement of the internal stakeholders during the change process is fostered by various mechanisms. At the organizational level, lower bureaucracy and flat structure lead to open communication between internal stakeholders. The managerial mechanisms are mainly based on a high-top management support, a motivating reward system and a flexible workload. These foster the implementation of an internal marketing strategy. The aim is to promote internal stakeholders' satisfaction and increase their engagement. Both mechanisms facilitate the involvement of internal stakeholders during the change process and lead to the development of a corporate strategy.

6. Conclusion

The study revealed some interesting findings regarding the implementation of organizational change towards enabling the company (Poult) to adopt 'corporate entrepreneurship' at a strategic and organization-wide level. These findings have both theoretical and practical implications.

6.1. Theoretical implications

The study's findings suggest that the implementation of Kotter's (1996) change framework for organizational change is insufficient in implementing organizational change. What is indeed needed based on the study's findings is the implementation of an organization-wide internal marketing effort aimed at winning the minds and hearts of the firm's internal stakeholders towards the change effort. An internal marketing strategy has the potential to motivate internal customers (internal stakeholders) to embrace and support the effort, to enable the firm to overcome any resistance and to facilitate the necessary organizational changes towards the adoption of corporate entrepreneurship.

The study also revealed that the success of the change program depends significantly on the notion of viewing and treating employees (internal stakeholders) as internal customers which is at the heart of the concept of internal marketing and although, the firm's management did not coin the term "internal marketing" it is clear that they have adopted its underlying principles and tools such as employee training and development programs, internal communication, monetary and non-monetary rewards as means to achieve organizational change. The study also corroborates the existent theory of how the organizational structure can be conducive to or hinder organizational change.

6.2. Practical implications

Poult's management embarked on an organization-wide change management process aimed at instilling a strong entrepreneurial spirit as a prerequisite for enabling the firm to become more flexible and adaptable to an increasingly dynamic external environment. To this end, internal stakeholders and hence, the adoption of the underlying ideas of internal marketing played a critical role towards the success of the effort. In fact, the internal marketing strategy was used as a change mechanism targeted at changing the organizational culture into one that nourishes a 'people' orientation and fosters creativity, innovation and a strong entrepreneurial spirit. This subsequently, enabled the firm to gain the support of its staff enabling them thus to understand the company's new strategic vision and goals.

According to the study's findings, the firm's organizational structure was rebuilt to eliminate hierarchical boundaries, bureaucracy and rigid control. Instead the aim was to create a flatter organizational structure, one that emphasized flexibility, team work and cooperation and allowed employees to take risks to generate ideas, create and innovate without the fear of rejection or blame.

By discussing and analysing corporate entrepreneurship from a change management perspective, it has enabled the authors to highlight the vital role that internal stakeholders play in the change process. It is clear, based on the study's findings, that any organizational change can be enhanced by the adoption on an organization-wide internal marketing strategy that can help people understand 'why' change is necessary and unite them towards the adoption of common goals.

The study also revealed that even though there is a need to follow a clear and structured process and adopt specific tools, the success of the change is not guaranteed unless the management pays attention to several intangible organizational aspects such as: organizational culture, corporate values, human capital, and the workforce morale. Future research could focus on exploring these dimensions for organizational change and enhance the proposed framework suggested by the authors.

Undoubtedly, the study has produced several findings that have both theoretical and practical implications. Managers seeking to pursue organizational changes within their businesses could benefit from the findings enabling them to understand and even adopt some of the principles and mechanisms used by Poult.

6.3. Limitations and future research

One should perhaps acknowledge that even though the study's findings have both theoretical and practical value, the nature of the study is limited to a single case and should not be generalized. There is a need to collect additional empirical evidence from other types of businesses and sectors not only from France but from other countries within and outside Europe. Nonetheless, the findings shed light onto the important role of internal stakeholders and internal marketing principles and tools as prerequisites for organizational change and the adoption of corporate entrepreneurship.

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